

TINY BUREAU'S BIG STORY

2 Men Exposed 'Massacre'

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Although David Obst and Seymour Hersh moved into their new office in the National Press Building two weeks ago, they still don't have any furniture. And at the rate they're preceeding, it probably will be quite a while before they're organized.

Obst and Hersh simply haven't had time for the luxury of setting up desks and chairs. Instead, they have been totally occupied with the task of almost singlehandedly investigating and publicizing one of the year's biggest news stories — the so-called "Pinkville massacre."

Hersh has been jet-hopping back and forth across the country to track down leads and piece together the story of the alleged murder of at least 109 Vietnamese in the village of My Lai by U.S. Army troops.

At the same time, Obst has been busy selling the story, telephoning newspapers in this country, Canada and England as well as hustling in and out of newspaper offices in the Press Building. He says that at one point he spent 18 consecutive hours on the telephone, talking with editors.

Backgrounds Sketched

The backgrounds of the two young men are almost as improbable as the technique they have used to bring the story to the attention of the public — and to provoke a controversy which has spread across both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Obst, the 23-year-old son of a Los Angeles advertising man, dropped out of a California college several years ago and traveled to Taiwan to complete his undergraduate education "because I decided I wasn't learning anything in school in this country."

He spent the past year at the University of California studying Chinese.

Hersh, 32, is a Washington-based free-lance writer who started his journalistic career as a police reporter with Chicago's City News Bureau, moved quickly through a string of newspaper and wire service jobs and has spent the last few years campaigning against chemical and biological warfare.

Today, Obst is general manager and Hersh the star writer for a newly established, play-it-by-ear news bureau known as the Dispatch News Service. Its

principal assets are the money earned in the past two weeks from stories about the mass killing — and the enthusiasm of its employees.

Success Unique

Dispatch's success is unique because almost all news stories presented to the public in this country are developed by long-established news gathering organizations — newspapers, radio and television stations, wire services, feature syndicates, magazines and other media.

The concept of two young men working for a new and unknown organization having such success in developing a major story without the knowledge of the other media and then selling the story to scores of newspapers is virtually without precedent.

How did they do it? Hersh, who has more Pentagon sources than most of the Defense Department correspondents employed by daily newspapers, got a tip about five or six weeks ago. "It was just simply a great story," he says. "I dropped everything else I was doing and started running it down."

Editors Called

Hersh, whose non-stop style overwhelms observers even when he isn't working on something important, began to criss-cross the country in search of witnesses to the alleged massacre. By Nov. 12, he had the story in hand and Obst was ready to begin a razzle-dazzle selling job on newspaper editors, who are leery of buying stories from people they don't know.

"I called the managing editor of every major newspaper in the country," says Obst, who recalls sprawling on the floor of the barren office with his shoes off and the phone to his face for 18 straight hours.

Out of 50 papers approached, 32 in this country and four in Canada agreed to buy the first story. The story caught on, other papers wanted follow-up material, the television networks became interested, and now two national news magazines are interviewing Hersh and Obst for possible stories on their operation.

"We started with very little," says Obst. "Now, we've established a news bureau. From here on out, we intend to be a clearinghouse for good investigative reporting in this country. We're already hearing from writers who say they've got good

material they couldn't publish elsewhere."

Dispatch actually started in late 1968, when Obst and another American in Taiwan, former Dartmouth student Michael Morrow, decided that conventional reporting of the Vietnam war was "concentrated on the soldiers and the politicians, but paid no attention to the people."

Vietnam Reported

With Obst selling the material to a handful of papers back in this country from his base in Taiwan, Morrow began his Vietnam. He was soon joined by vietnam. He was soon joined by Donald Luce, a member of the International Voluntary Services who quit his volunteer post because he thought his work was being corrupted to help perpetuate the war.

They have recently been joined by others. Last weekend, Dispatch sold to 15 newspapers a series by Richard Barnett, who has just returned from a visit to Hanoi. Barnett is co-director of Washington's Institute for Policy Studies, a radically oriented "think tank."

And Columbia University Prof. Seymour M. Melman, a long-time critic of this country's military policies, will soon be writing for Dispatch, says Obst.

The youthful salesman acknowledges that Dispatch has a left-of-center, anti-war tone, but insists that "we're certainly not ideologues."

"We're no more an anti-war news agency than the Chicago Tribune is a pro-war news agency."

Army Information

Hersh, ironically, once served as a public information officer for the Army, during a six-month active duty stint at Ft. Riley, Kan., while a reservist. With a smile, he notes that he never even made it to private 1st class.

After he was discharged from the Army, Hersh worked on a Chicago suburban newspaper, then published a paper in the same area. In 1962, he joined United Press International in Pierre, S.D., but a year later switched to the Associated Press in Chicago.

In late 1966, the AP sent Hersh to Washington, where he covered the Pentagon until resigning in the summer of 1967 to work on a book: "Chemical and Biological Warfare: America's Hidden Arsenal."

Since that time, Hersh has written a dozen magazine articles on the dangers of CBW, and has been instrumental in providing material on the subject to numerous members of Congress, including Rep Richard D. McCarthy, D-N.Y., the leading House opponent of CBW.

Hersh may well have readers in high places in government. In the middle of all the controversy yesterday about the incident at My Lai, President Nixon brought a virtual end to the young writer's earlier crusade by announcing an end to the use of bacteriological weapons and stringent new controls on the use of chemical weapons.

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